DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 022 FL 019 537

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TITLE Policy-Making in Foreign Language Teaching.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 15p.; In: "Balance & Perspectives: 25 Years of Dutch Applied Linguistics" (see FL 019 532).
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Toegepaste Taalwetenschap in Artikelen (Applied Linguistics in Articles); n36 p86-99 1990

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Applied Linguistics; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Language Planning; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; Policy Formation; Public Policy; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Programs; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The role of the applied linguist in interpreting research for language teaching policy formation is examined. First, foreign language teaching policy, and the various considerations to be made in determining policy, are defined. Then three aspects of language teaching are discussed: policy developments in the Netherlands in the last few decades, and more specifically the contributions of applied linguists; use of applied linguists in other countries for help in establishing policy; and a Dutch national project to arrive at foreign language teaching policy recommendations. It is concluded that not only has the applied linguist been an important participant in the policy formation process, he is entitled and even obligated to participate. The layman may be capable of translating research findings into policy, but he may not pursue research adequately and may disregard or misrepresent important information if he is not familiar with the field. A 31-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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POLICY-MAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING *

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1. *Introduction*

My taking stock of developments in foreign language teaching policy was not in all respects made easier by the fact that I myself have regularly contributed to the discussions on the topic in our country (see list of references). Not only can a succession of references to previous publications of one's own easily create the impression of some degree of immodesty, but there is also a serious risk that one may lose sight of the true proportion of things. The fact that, in the process of stock-taking, I have hardly come across views or statements of my own that I would now disclaim, is not in itself very reassuring. This may point to a large measure of consistency -or, rather, tenacity- on my part, but is not necessarily a guarantee for the correctness of the views pronounced. In the last instance, it is for the reader to judge.

The major theme of this paper is a further clarification and definition of the contribution of the applied linguist to the translation of his research findings into foreign language teaching policy. For one who, like me, has of late been intensely engaged in writing a National Programme of Action for Modern Foreign Languages -commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education-, such an exercise is very much like an act of soul-searching. No one will call the need for such a National Programme of Action (NPA) in question, but is it all right for the professional applied linguist to be so directly involved, even if his contribution is properly compensated for financially by the government? That , of course, is a pertinent question, and it seems a proper theme for a day like this at which we, applied linguists, take stock of our achievements and reflect on the future perspectives of our discipline.

I will start by defining what for the purposes of this paper is to be understood by foreign language teaching policy. After that I will pursue three lines of approach: first, I will discuss some developments in the Netherlands in the last few decades; second, international developments; and, finally and more in particular, the Dutch NPA.

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2. *Foreign Language Teaching Policy: defining the field*

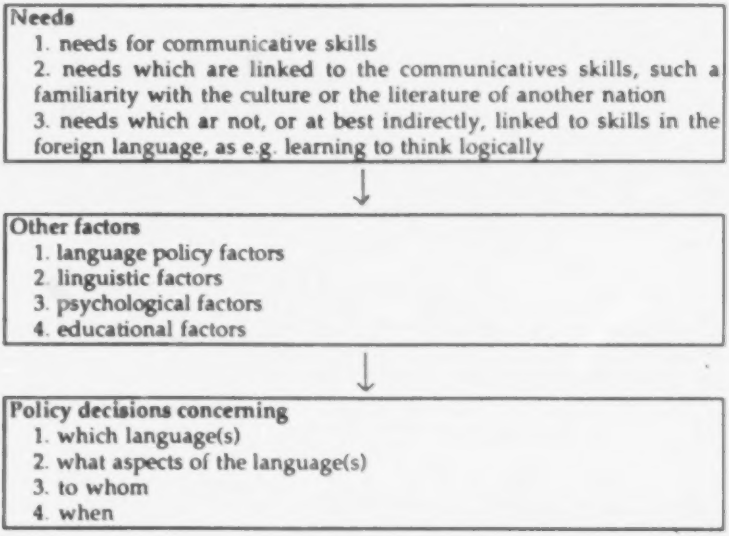
Decisions on aims and organization of foreign language teaching (FLT) are taken at various levels. The actual implementation of FLT in the classroom is mainly decided on by the teacher, day after day, whether or not in consultation with his colleagues. A number of important matters concerning his teaching have, however, already been decided upon before the teacher enters the classroom. At a higher level it has for instance been established which language he is to teach, what aims he has to strive for and how many lessons are available for the programme. In this paper I shall discuss policies at the latter level, i.e. the macro level, and I shall refrain from discussing the micro level, even if decisions at that level should also be looked upon as part and parcel of educational policy-making (cf. Cooper 1988, 148-149). The involvement of the applied linguistic researcher in the process of policy-making is, of course, basically of the same character at both levels, but doubts as to the 'permissibility' of any kind of direct involvement of the applied linguist are less readily expressed in relation to the micro level than to the macro level. Reason enough in itself, it seems, to concentrate on the latter level.

A general remark, even if it is more or less an aside, may be called for at this point. By those who are concerned with language policy and language planning in general, foreign language teaching policy is hardly ever treated as an object of language policy-making. Only two of the more than 25 contributions in Lowenberg (1988) address issues of foreign language teaching policy. In Kennedy (1989) the teaching of English as a *foreign* language is hardly a point of discussion. In particular, discussion of policy-decisions on the choice of English as one option out of more foreign languages is conspicuously absent. Even the paper by Olshtain (1989) in this reader, which comes nearest to it, does not deal with English as a foreign language as a separate problem area. The only researcher who does pay special attention to it, is Stern (1983). Stern, whose ideas I will return to later, observes (p.269): «But the sociology of language has hitherto paid relatively little direct attention to a society's deliberate attempts to develop second language competence and bilingualism by its educational policy».

I have already mentioned in passing the most important questions which come up for discussion at the macro level: which language(s) should be taught, and on what criteria are such choices based? what of the language(s) should be taught, in particular, what aspects and at what level of proficiency? what place is to be allotted to the language(s) in the educational system, that is: to what pupils, in what sector of the educational system, are the foreign languages in question to be taught? (see also Stern 1983: 281). These questions may be summed up as follows: which languages, which of their aspects, to whom, when? The answers are not easy to formulate. In the Dutch context we only have to remind ourselves of the continuous struggle which took place in the early 1970s over the maintenance of French as a compulsory subject in the first form of general secondary education, when such arguments were brought forward

in favour of French as: "the determinative and selective power of French is much greater than that of German or Englisch" (quoted in Van Els 1976b). In order to clarify this very complex decision-taking process somewhat I made an attempt -around 1975- to fit all factors that have to be taken into account, into a hierarchical model. The model is represented schematically in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: Factors determining the choice of, and between, foreign languages



The model was discussed by me for the first time at the tenth anniversary of the 'Institute of Living Languages' of Leuven University in 1975 (cf. Van Els 1976a). Its fullest treatment is to be found in Van Els et al.(1984) and in Van Els & de Jong(1985) (see also Van Els 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1988; Van Els & Extra 1987). It would lead too far to treat it *in extenso*. There are only two points that I would like to put forward, with some emphasis; other points may come up for discussion later on.

First of all, the three categories of needs carry different weights in policy decisions. Let me quote -in paraphrase- what I have said before in this respect (Van Els & De Jong 1985:16): "When an educational policy has to be devised in which a place is to be claimed for foreign languages besides other subjects, or in which the teaching of one foreign language has to be balanced against that of another, it is evident that the first category of needs, the communicative needs, carries more weight than the second and the second category more than the third. It is evident that the latter

category of needs carries no weight when a choice has to be made between several foreign languages, for it is unlikely that the teaching of one specific language only encourages 'logical reasoning' or that it takes the teaching of more foreign languages than one to accomplish that".

The second point is that an educational policy cannot be based solely on the needs factor. Other factors have to be taken into account as well, if only after needs have been considered. For example, it may be the case that within the context of the European Community the Dutch government has agreed to give particular foreign languages a place in the national school system. Another example of such other factors is the availability of sufficient course materials for the teaching of a particular language or of qualified teachers.

Let us, at this point, consider for a moment -in the light of the above model - the role an applied linguist could play in this type of policy development. It is clear that the raw materials for policy-making can and should be procured from the relevant disciplines. In our discipline it is the applied linguist -whether or not in cooperation with researchers from other disciplines- who is best equipped to provide information on and an insight into such matters as the range and effects of the various factors. But the question is whether the applied linguist, having supplied that kind of information, ought to withdraw and leave the ensuing process of decision-taking entirely to the policy-makers. There can be no doubt that the final decision is always a purely political one in which the applied linguist *per se* cannot have any part. Take, for example, the well-known foreign language needs study conducted some time ago by Claessen et al. (1978). The results show that needs for different foreign languages vary considerably for two of the domains of usage distinguished in the study, viz. 'leisure' and 'work'. The decision -a not altogether unimportant one, we may add- as to which of these domains is to be given priority, is a purely political affair. But, perhaps, the applied linguist should also participate in the actual decision-*making* process. Some say it would be a good thing if he did, because often there is not much readiness to actually reconsider educational policy on the basis of the applied linguist's findings, witness the way Claessen et al.'s (1987) findings have been ignored. Even if, on the other hand, the applied linguist does not feel called upon to play the part of the 'involved campaigner' (Van Els & Oud-de Glas 1983:10), the least he ought to do is to critically assess, in retrospect, whether the educational policy that has been decided on, tallies with the raw materials that his discipline has supplied. It seems to me, however, that the applied linguist's role should not be restricted to commenting on policy decisions: he should also take part in drawing up policy recommendations. This view is also taken by Olshtain (1989:54): "Researchers and experts then prepare a document which incorporates their findings and policy-making recommendations". Only thus can one hope to prevent that deep-seated convictions of the layman will dominate educational policy. I am thinking of a number of convictions that seem to be shared by many non-experts in the country and which we, for example, had to take account of while preparing the NPA, such as the view that the

main problem that vocational and professional people encounter in communicating in a foreign language is specialist vocabulary and the mistaken idea that all FLT shortcomings in the second phase of general secondary education can be put an end to by re-establishing both German, English and French as compulsory exam subjects.

3. *Developments in Foreign Language Teaching Policy in the Netherlands*

It is impossible to give a full picture, in a few lines, of the developments that in the past few decades have taken place in FLT policy in our country with respect to the question what foreign languages should be offered. Fairly extensive and detailed descriptions are available elsewhere (Van Els et al. 1977; Van Els & Radstake 1987). I will restrict myself to highlighting two major events and to focussing on the role and influence of applied linguists.

Since the major re-organization of the Dutch secondary school-system in 1968, when a new education act, the so-called Mammoth Act, became effective, there have been no drastic changes in policy regarding the question what foreign languages should be offered in secondary education. The piecemeal introduction of Spanish as a subject of general secondary education and, on a very limited scale, also of Russian as an exam subject fitted within the framework laid out by the 1968 Act. But there have been attempts to change the policy that are worth mentioning, if only because of their relationship with the proposals of the NPA.

The Mammoth Act laid down that French be taught as a compulsory subject in all first forms of general secondary education. This soon turned out to be problematic for a number of reasons. In 1973 the State Secretary of Education introduced a bill, the main aim of which was to harmonize the curricula of the first forms of general and vocational secondary education and which ruled that only one foreign language be taught as a compulsory subject, without specifying which language should be taught. It was to be expected that all schools would opt for English and many feared that the position of French would be seriously endangered. This led to fierce protests, nation-wide actions and, eventually, a commission from the State Secretary to the Institute of Applied Social Sciences (Nijmegen) for a large-scale investigation of both the interest in and the need for foreign languages in the Netherlands. A number of applied linguists took actively part in the execution of the project and in its supervision. The research project was concluded in 1978 (cf. Claessen et al. 1978). It was a very successful study and it is still unique in its kind (cf. Van Els & Oud-de Glas 1983; Van Els & Extra 1987). However, the research report only presented the research findings the State Secretary had asked for and did not contain any policy recommendations based on these findings. In the meantime the proposal to harmonize the curricula of the first forms of the general and the vocational sectors of secondary education had become part of a far-ranging plan for a full integration of the first phase of secondary education. The State Secretary, therefore, could not use the

research findings for a renewed discussion of the 'Harmonization Bill'. What is worse, however, is that the findings also remained unconsidered when new proposals were subsequently developed for the integrated first phase and for adapting the second phase of secondary education. The group that had supervised the needs project, then decided to volunteer policy recommendations of its own making, to a large extent based on the findings of the project (cf. Smit 1980). However, these recommendations did not have any notable influence on policy-making, even though they received a lot of publicity. For example, in one of the proposals for an integrated first phase two foreign languages were made compulsory for every pupil -the first being English and the second French or German, to be chosen by the pupils after one year of orientation in both languages-, a proposal that cannot be squared with the recommendations of the group.

The Bill for the integrated first phase which is now being discussed, closely follows recommendations for a new system of so-called 'Basic Education' (duration 3 years) that were worked out in 1985 by a government commission, the 'Scientific Council for Government Policy' (WRR). At the request of WRR De Jong and myself had written a working document on the place of foreign languages in 'Basic Education' (cf. Van Els & De Jong 1985). In our recommendations we leaned heavily on the approach that I introduced above and, in particular, on the findings of the needs-project. It was our proposal to abandon the idea that pupils should be free to choose between languages, even if the moment of choice was preceded by a period of orientation, and to make two languages, English and German, compulsory for everyone . The result was that both the WRR and the government, eventually, decided on English as the first compulsory language and on a choice between French and German as the second compulsory language, without a period of orientation, though!

A few years ago English was introduced as a compulsory subject in primary education. We will have to refrain from giving any details (see, for an extensive description, Van Els et al. 1977). It is important to note that expert advice on the introduction of the language was sought from applied linguists of the University of Utrecht and that applied linguists were asked to conduct experiments to gain insight into the conditions for introduction. (cf. Carpay et al. 1972). The recommendation of this group to restrict FLT in primary education to only one language, English, was adopted by the Minister of Education.

Summing up, we can conclude that in the past few decades applied linguists have regularly contributed to developing policy recommendations, partly at the government's request, partly because they themselves chose to do so, with varying degrees of success. Applied linguists have not restricted themselves to providing the raw materials for FLT policy-making.

4. Developments in Foreign Language Teaching Policy Abroad

In general, there is much less activity in other countries with regard to the development of FLT-policy than in the Netherlands and fewer applied linguists are engaged in formulating policy recommendations. With regard to the first point, it appears from surveys of needs research (cf. Van Els & Oud- de Glas 1983; Van Els & Extra 1987) that relatively little needs research has been carried out elsewhere, that the research that has been done is rather variable with respect to research objectives, design and quality of execution, and that -as we have already mentioned- the Dutch needs research project has no equal in the world, except possibly in Belgium where it was replicated (cf. Verdoodt & Sente 1983).

However, a very important development can be reported from Australia. In that country a 'National Policy on Languages' was only recently decided on by the federation (cf. Lo Bianco 1987), which is to serve as a basis for the policies of the separate states. Thus, the State of Victoria has recently worked out its own language policy (cf. Lo Bianco 1989). The special feature of Australian language policy is that it encompasses all languages and all language-teaching in the country, including FLT. The policy was developed on the basis of a very detailed survey of all the languages that are spoken in the country and of all language teaching activities. By the way, demand for and needs of languages have not been investigated to any extent. A major objective of Australia's language policy is to stimulate the creation of language teaching programmes, especially by financing separate projects. Applied linguists have been, and are, very deeply involved, both in the development of the policy recommendations and in their implementation.

In Europe, German applied linguists in particular take an active part in developing FLT policies for their country. K. Schröder, F.J. Zapp and H. Christ are among the most prominent in this respect (cf. e.g. Christ 1981). A striking point in their proposals is that they are looking for ways to curb the ever growing supremacy of English as the first foreign language in most of the States of the Federal Republic, at least to the extent that other languages, in particular French, Spanish and Italian are not altogether pushed aside. They favour a kind of 'controlled' diversification. For some time now France has known an extreme form of 'diversification' of its FLT, which means that pupils in secondary education can, in principle, choose from a great many foreign languages.

Finally, it is striking that recent English-language publications which devote attention to FLT policy, such as Stern (1983) and Olshtain (1989), largely ignore the great number of German- or French-language publications of German applied linguists. The views expressed by Olshtain (1989:48) on how such a policy should be developed, are somewhat disappointing, possibly because of her lack of acquaintance with these publications. Thus, she distinguishes three categories of factors in a 'fact-finding phase' that overlap considerably, which she fails to point out: 1) 'societal needs', 2) 'group and individual attitudes', and 3) 'political, national and economic considerations'. What Stern (1983: 281-282) puts

forward, sounds much better. His proposals for FLT-planning closely resemble the procedures he has worked out elsewhere in his book for language planning in general. Also, the first three of the five phases that he distinguishes are closely parallel to the design that we have chosen for the NPA:

1) a 'fact-finding survey' in which the language situation of the country is investigated, together with the current language teaching efforts and language needs;
2) the development of a 'language plan' (or a number of 'alternative plans'), with a reasoned selection and order of priority of languages that ought to be taught in schools, universities and language centres. To quote Stern (1983: 281) on this point:
   "One or two foreign languages (A or B) may be planned as universally necessary or available in primary, secondary, higher and adult education. Other languages (X, Y or Z) are planned to be offered only in university programmes.....";
3) 'linguistic planning', in which objectives are defined for each of the foreign languages and in which the foundation is laid for curriculum development.

Next in Stern's (1983) model two further phases are distinguished, implementation and evaluation. The discussion of his proposals nicely links up this section with the next section on the NPA.

5. The National Programme of Action for Modern Foreign Languages in the Netherlands

It is hardly feasible to attempt to deal fully with all the aspects either of the project that has led to the development of the NPA., or of the results that it has yielded. Full information on both project and NPA is to be found in the two publications that have resulted from the project (cf. Van Els et al. 1990; Van Hest et al. 1990). First, I will give some background information on the project itself, then I will discuss some of the findings of our investigations and, finally, I will dwell on some major considerations in connection with the recommendations that were drawn up in the Plan.

a. The project

It is generally expected in the Netherlands that the need for foreign language skills will continue to increase (think of 'Europe 1992' and related developments). The Dutch authorities are confronted with ever-growing concerns because of that: will our educational system, which - naturally - has its limitations, be able to cope? My suggestion - which I made at a conference organized jointly by three Dutch ministries in December 1988 - to draw up a broad National Programme of Action , was taken up by the State Secretary of Education and in March 1989 I was commissioned to draw up such a programme before Christmas 1989. All the necessary funds for the project were made available.

The NPA was to be all-encompassing, both with regard to the analysis of 'supply' and 'demand' and in its recommendations. Thus, all the needs for foreign language skills were to be investigated, and not, for example, only those for particular languages or only those of particular target groups or only those related to particular domains of usage. The only restriction applied was contained in the specification 'foreign' languages: we were not commissioned to draw up a plan encompassing *all* languages - as in the Australian language plan -, i.e. a plan in which the place of standard Dutch, of Frisian, of the dialects, of Dutch as a Second language, and of Dutch Sign Language would also be gone into and defined. On the other hand, the plan was to treat the whole supply of foreign language competence in the country, including the foreign language skills of native speakers of the languages concerned resident in the Netherlands - most of them first or second generation immigrants.

The recommendations concern bottlenecks on the supply side. These bottlenecks were spotted and subsequently analysed mainly, but not exclusively, on the basis of very extensive inventories of the demand, of available foreign language skills and of educational supply. The research and inquiries were conducted by research assistants hired for the purpose; part of the research was contracted out to the Institute of Applied Social Sciences. A Working Group and a Resonance Group were formed to take part in the process of tracing the most relevant bottlenecks and of drawing up policy recommendations.

b. The National Programme of Action: Findings and Considerations

In the Netherlands, some searching will quickly produce a wealth of information on supply and demand in foreign languages. A complete picture of supply and demand, however, is not presented in our final report, and we had not committed ourselves to giving such a picture. The limitations of time that we had to observe, played a part of course, but even if we had been granted much more time for the project, a perfectly complete picture would still have been unattainable. For example, even the very rich data of the previous needs research by the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, are very meagre, when questions have to be answered with regard to the precise structure of the language use registered. Moreover, the research data were collected with the help of questionnaires, and we know from research on language loss, for instance, how 'coloured' individual persons' verdicts on their own language deficiencies can be (cf. e.g. Van Els & Weltens 1989). There is a similar problem with our descriptions of the output of our school system: what particular levels of language proficiency represent exactly, we do not know, whereas it is, of course, very obvious that the level distinctions that figure in our, and in other, investigations are very gross and vague.

A very general conclusion concerning the findings of our investigations is that both supply and demand of foreign language skills have increased in the Netherlands over the past few years. To some, the conclusion concerning the supply side may come as a surprise in view of

the ever-increasing complaints about the declining standards of foreign language skills in the country. There is, however, only a seeming contradiction. There are at least two obvious explanations. One is that, whereas individual pupils who have attended a particular sector of our educational system may attain less high levels of competence in, possibly, fewer foreign languages than their counterparts two or three decades ago - the grammar school is a case in point -, it is a fact that a much greater proportion of the population nowadays attends grammar school than before and, thus, at least an equal proportion of the population takes three foreign languages at the highest level in secondary education. The other explanation is that the demand for foreign language skills grows much faster than the supply: there is an increase in the number of *people* who need foreign language skills, there is an increase in the number of *languages* needed, and there is an increase in the *level* of proficiency required for these languages. For detailed information on the findings the reader is referred to Van Hest et al. (1990) in particular; Van Els et al. (1990) presents a summary review of the findings.

And now, finally, let me dwell on some considerations in connection with some of the recommendations. In its recommendations - 34 in all, reflecting on all sectors of the supply side - the NPA addresses not only the national government, but also all other 'actors' in the field, such as the business community that runs its own specialized language courses, and private FLT-institutes.

It is a good thing, too, that there are a number of different actors in the field, since one should not only look to the national school system, let alone (certain sectors of) secondary education, for solutions for the increased and still growing need for foreign language competence. It has been stressed before (cf. e.g. Van Els 1983a), but the NPA spells it out much more cogently: all educational sectors, public and private, will have to join in a division of labour to cover all the FLT needs.

Division of labour implies steering, referred to by Stern (1983:281) as: "a reasoned selection and arrangement of languages in order of priority". Steering may also entail applying certain restrictions in the supply of languages in various sectors of the educational system. In particular with regard to the (re-) organization of our present and future system of secondary education - both first and second phase - there are a number of hotly debated issues. Leaving aside the specific recommendations made by the NPA, let me mention some of the considerations that we think are important in this connection. The number of foreign languages from which pupils can choose in the future first phase of secondary education and from which they can make a selection for their final exams, have to be strictly regulated. 'Equality' of languages does not mean that each language has a right to be learnt in school, and, certainly, does not guarantee a place for each language in any sector of the educational system. The main criterion for establishing priorities among languages, in the Dutch situation, is the size of the needs of the first category, the communicative needs (see Diagram). That, obviously, does not mean - it should be emphasized again - that the actual course content for the

languages which are given priority should be restricted to material related to those 'utilitarian' needs.

Regulating the supply side -and, thus, putting restrictions on it in various sectors- also entails, of course, the need for coherence with respect to the courses offered by the various sectors. No arrangements for the first phase of secondary education without giving proper thought to the consequences for the second phase! In the NPA an attempt is made to present a coherent set of proposals for the whole of first and second phases of secondary education -both general and vocational- and for the various sectors of tertiary education.

Our coherent proposals not only relate to the distribution of the languages over the various sectors, but also to each of these languages individually in as much as they are taught in adjoining sectors of the educational system. Quantitative and qualitative improvement on the supply side can also be achieved within the framework of existing facilities. A major contribution to improving the output can be made by removing a number of problems of connection, between the various levels in the Dutch educational system. It is a well-known fact that these problems are considerable in the case of English in primary schools and the first forms of secondary education, for the first and second phases of secondary education and for the various types of vocational education. There are at least two possibilities to tackle these problems: in the first place, by defining objectives for each of the school types and of their levels much more explicitly and in much greater detail than we have done so far; and, in the second place, by formulating all FLT objectives within one and the same all-encompassing framework. Those who have realised that, due to the vagueness of current objectives, foreign languages have been taught without proper orientation and that a great deal of loss has been the result of that, have been pressing for more explicit and more detailed objectives for a great many years. The development of an all-encompassing framework, moreover, could bring about much more agreement between the sectors of the educational system - including the private sector- and between the various foreign languages. Discussions on the possibility of creating such a framework, then referred to as an "Autonomous Structure" (cf. Smit 1980; Van Els & Slagter 1982; Van Els 1985), date back to the early 80s. According to the NPA the time has now come to seriously attempt to develop such a general framework for FLT in the Netherlands.

There are two further measures by which one may hope to improve the output of FLT in secondary education without drastic changes in the facilities available for foreign languages. The first is directed at properly defining the objectives to be attained at the end of the first phase of general secondary education. At present it is far from clear what competence pupils achieve in the foreign languages in which they do not take their final exams. As a consequence, it is quite common for people to assume that those who decide to drop French or German at the end of the first phase, have not acquired any competence in these languages. Recent foreign language loss research (cf. Weltens 1988; Van Els & Weltens 1989;

Van Els 1989) has revealed that the situation is much less gloomy and that there is a great deal of foreign language competence the existence of which is widely ignored. If only to convince people of this in various sectors of society, but mainly in order to decrease the great variety of levels of competence attained under the present conditions, it is absolutely necessary to define and clearly describe the 'intermediary' level of the first phase of general secondary education. The second measure would be to put an end to the totally undifferentiated, monolithic, provision of foreign languages in the second phase of secondary education: why should one require every one to take one and the same programme for each of the languages selected right up to the final exams? Why not offer pupils the opportunity to obtain certificates only for one or two distinct and self-contained parts of the full programme? In this way attempts could be made to gear the FLT-programme better to the demands of higher education and/or business and commerce. The two measures would lead to a much larger flexibility with respect to organization of the second phase.

Our concluding remark concerns the implementation of the Programme. It is not uncommon for important research reports or plans of this kind to remain without effect. They may attract some publicity and, subsequently, be ignored by the educational authorities and/or politicians. What are the chances of the NPA? There are two reasons for me not to be too pessimistic about the eventual impact of our proposals. One is that the writing of the national programme was commissioned by the State Secretary, largely as a result of pressure from 'consumers' of FLT-programmes in the country, and much less at the urgent request of the educational sector itself, which for instance was the case with the large needs research project of the 70s. As was the case with the successful project which was set up to introduce English into primary education, it was first and foremost an initiative of the authorities themselves. The second reason is that the Minister and the State Secretary of Education have publicly committed themselves in Parliament to use the NPA as the point of departure for future reconsiderations of flt policy.

6. Conclusion

My conclusion regarding the contributions of applied linguists in formulating policy-recommendations will have become clear in the meantime: not only have applied linguists regularly been involved in such activities in the past, the applied linguist is also fully entitled to do so and, I think, has an obligation to do so. Translating research findings and insights into practical policy-recommendations may be left to the layman, but there is a serious danger that policy-makers may not of their own accord look for such findings and insights. Moreover, the layman can only achieve an adequate translation, if he is very well acquainted with what our discipline has to offer. Otherwise, he may easily disregard useful facts and insights or misrepresent their true meaning.

It is well-known that a researcher who does get involved, often has to take a stand in sensitive issues and sometimes has to soil his hands. Some will blame him for that, but that - I think - can hardly be a reason for keeping aloof in these matters.

* The present text is an adapted version of the paper read on 15th December 1989. Major changes have been introduced in particular in the section that deals with the 'National Programme of Action for Modern Foreign Languages in the Netherlands'. At the time of delivery of the paper the National Programme had not yet been finalised. In the meantime it has been presented to the Minister of Education, so that now its substance can be freely and publicly discussed.

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